

HISTORIOGRAPHY IN MODERN INDIA

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar

Heras Memorial Lectures
1967

Issued under the auspices of
Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture

1970

ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
New York

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The Heras Memorial Lectures honour the memory of an eminent historian and indologist, the Rev. Henry Heras, S.J. Father Heras came to India from Spain in 1922 at the age of thirty-two to be Professor of Indian History at St. Xavier's College, Bombay. He died here in 1955 after spending half his life in studying India's past in order to make known to the world the traditions and culture of the land he made his own and whose citizen he became. After his death, the Indian Historical Research Institute which he founded at St. Xavier's College was renamed the Heras Institute of Indian History and Culture.

Sponsored by the Heras Society and by St. Xavier's College, the Memorial Lectures, which deal with themes pertaining to Indian history and culture, were started in 1960. The series was opened by Dr. H. D. Sankalia, whose lectures have been published by Asia Publishing House under the title *Indian Archaeology Today* (1962). Subsequent lectures have also been published by the same firm, for which the Heras Institute is sincerely thankful. The titles are as follows: *Sources of Indian History with Special Reference to South India*, by Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (1964); *Bombay Presidency in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*, by Holden Furber (1965); *Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture*, by Prof. A. L. Basham (1966); *Cultural Trends in Medieval India*, by Prof. H. K. Sherwani (1968). The present volume presents the lectures of 1967. The Institute is indeed happy that it was able to secure the services of three senior Indian historians of international renown: Professors Sastri, Sherwani and Majumdar.

SBN 210.22273.5

PRINTED IN INDIA

BY A. DELBEKE, S.J., AT THE CATHOLIC PRESS, RANCHI,
AND PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING
HOUSE, NEW YORK, N.Y., U.S.A.

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First Lecture

Historiography in Europe and its Influence on the Writing of Indian History in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

I PROPOSE to discuss in three lectures the development of historiography in India since A.D. 1800. As in many other branches of knowledge and departments of study, India was profoundly influenced by Western ideas in the conception of history and the principles of writing it, and the old ideas and methods were changed almost beyond recognition. In order to understand properly the nature and extent of this great change it is necessary to begin with a brief account of the origin and development of modern historiography in Europe, and an analysis of its essential features which exercised great influence on the writing of Indian history in modern times.

Development of Modern Historiography in Europe¹

Historiography in the Medieval Age in Europe is represented by a number of chronicles. In the seventeenth century appeared a number of historical works which dealt with the events in which the author himself took some part, and/or those which happened in the immediate past, of which living traditions were still available.

In either case the events recorded from personal knowledge of the author may be regarded as fairly authentic, subject to those tests which must be applied to all such documents of all ages in order to eliminate personal factors which may vitiate

¹This section is primarily based on the following four books: G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century*, 1913; *Selected Essays of Bury*, edited by H. Temperley, 1930; Sir Charles Oman, *On the Writing of History*, 1939; A. L. Rowse, *The Use of History*, 1946.

or diminish its authenticity. But so far as the account of the period anterior to the author is concerned — and this must have been the case of the majority of historical works — the principles followed in writing them suffered from several serious defects, which may be enumerated as follows:

The first defect was the lack of critical spirit. More or less absolute reliance was placed on whatever was recorded in any older book. The authors never felt the need of examining critically the authenticity of the sources from which they derived their information. They were accepted without question, and well-established traditions were regarded as authentic facts. What was worse still, no attempt was made to distinguish myths and legends from what may be reasonably regarded as historical facts.

The second defect was the limitation of the scope of history. The Christian church formed the main theme of historians during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Gradually subjects of secular character were taken up, but even then political history formed the main, if not the exclusive, subject of study.

Lastly, there was a tendency to attribute important events to the interposition of Providence by way of vindicating religious and moral principles, and no attempt was made to look for natural causes of events.

A reaction against all these began with the Renaissance which brought about secularization of thought. The brooding asceticism was replaced by a pride in man and his mental power, and speculations on his spiritual nature and future prospects gave place to inquiries into his actual achievements on this earth. This spirit had its repercussion on history. Documents were critically studied and many were rejected as forgeries. Traditions and legends were confronted with a sceptical spirit. The great French publicist Bodin approached history in a thoroughly scientific spirit and laid down the principle that in judging of the views and values of a writer due weight must be given to such factors as his personal position, patriotic and religious bias, and above all, the opportunity he possessed of knowing facts about the topic he related. He also drew attention to the influence of geography, climate and soil on the character of the people and history of nations.

With the progress of time greater attention was paid to a systematic and exhaustive collection of source materials, and a far more critical attitude was adopted in assessing their value. Other improvements also followed. Attention was paid to the literary excellence of historical narrative so as to make it interesting to readers. The scope of history was widened so as to make it the real history of mankind by describing not only political events and political institutions, but also the moral, social, economic, artistic and literary life of the people. Serious attempts were made to survey civilization as a whole, and there were various philosophical interpretations of the progress of humanity as a whole on the basis of authenticated facts.

Two great historians, Niebuhr and Ranke, may be cited as the best representatives of the new spirit of historiography which reached its high-water mark in the nineteenth century.

Niebuhr (1776-1831) has been described by an eminent critic as "the first commanding figure in modern historiography, the scholar who raised history from a subordinate place to the dignity of an independent science."² Niebuhr evolved some fundamental principles while writing the history of Rome. "No one before him regarded Rome as above all a great State, the institutions of which, political, legal and economic, must be traced to their origin and followed through their successive changes. He made a critical examination of the sources and credibility of early Roman history and rightly rejected much of the narrative that was then generally accepted as history."³ He laid down the first and the most fundamental principle which should guide the students of history, and any historian deviating from it, even with the best of motives, can only do so at his peril. As I consider this to be the highest ideal which an Indian historian needs to be reminded of every day and every moment in his life, I make no excuse for quoting his own words.

"In laying down the pen we must be able to say in the sight of God, 'I have not knowingly, nor without earnest investigation, written anything which is not true'."⁴ He was not unaware of the risk involved in giving effect to this high principle.

²Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 19.

Referring to the new points of view, sometimes radically different from the current orthodox notion of long standing, he said: "One could not have maintained these things in earlier times without danger to life and liberty. Philologists would have cried treachery, the theologians high treason, and public opinion would have stoned one."⁵ Unfortunately such dangers are not altogether things of the past. We all know how in his own country and other Fascist and Communist countries, truth was the first casualty not only in times of war, as always happens, but even in times of peace, and history has been the worst sufferer. The disease has, however, proved epidemic and in our own country there are ominous signs that history is slowly deviating from the great ideal of truth in the name of patriotism, communal harmony, national integration and other such high-sounding phrases. I shall have occasion to give concrete illustrations of this degeneration of historiography that is slowly taking place before our very eyes.

As regards Ranke, the other great representative of modern historiography, the beginning of the critical era of historiography is commonly held to date from the publication of his first work, *Histories of the Romance (Latin) and Teutonic Peoples*, published in 1824. In his famous discussion of the authorities, in an Appendix to this work, Ranke applied to modern history the principles which Niebuhr evolved in regard to ancient history. He adopted the maxims that the nearest witness to the event was the best, and that the letters of the actors were of more value than the anecdotes of the chronicles. To these he added a novel method of assessing the value of a written document, namely to determine the personality of the writer and to inquire whence he derived his information. The value of his testimony is to be judged by his intellectual make-up and the motive by which he was inspired to write. By rigorous application of this method he proved the absolutely unreliable character of many source materials which were till then regarded as highly valuable.

Ranke has the same scrupulous regard for truth as Niebuhr. In his Preface to the book mentioned above, he says:

"I found by comparison that the truth was more interesting and beautiful than the romance. I turned away from it and

⁵*Ibid.*

resolved to avoid all invention and imagination in my works and stick to fact."

Again, "history has had assigned to it the task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the ages to come. To such lofty functions this work does not aspire. Its aim is merely to show what actually occurred."

This book — the earliest work of the greatest of modern historians — constituted a distinct advance in the objective treatment of European history. It is not necessary to discuss any further the development of historiography in Europe as enough has been said to indicate its general trends and fundamental principles.

It is, however, interesting to note that strange as it may seem, these advanced ideas of historiography were not altogether unknown in India, although lack of historical writings is the weakest point in ancient Indian literature. Kalhaṇa, the only historian that ancient India can boast of, indicated in the introductory verses⁶ of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (History of Kashmir) composed in the middle of the twelfth century, that he fully understood the fundamental principles of modern historiography. In the first place, we are told that he studied not only eleven existing historical books on Kashmir but corrected errors in them 'by the inspection of ordinances of former kings and laudatory inscriptions as well as written records'. Secondly, he held that a true historian should, like a judge, recount the events of the past after having discarded bias as well as prejudice. Unfortunately, not only these ideals but the very idea of writing history seemed to have passed away with Kalhaṇa without leaving any trace behind. As will be shown later, the Hindus at the beginning of the nineteenth century had no knowledge of their own history and their early attempts to reconstruct it were not only crude but almost ridiculous. Consequently the first English writers on Indian history possessed very little knowledge of Ancient India, and though they had fairly developed ideas of historiography their accounts of Ancient India were very poor and sometimes even ridiculous.

For all practical purposes, therefore, the history of Ancient India, up to the middle of the nineteenth century, was treated in a very summary way and mainly as a background of the history

⁶First *Taraṅga*, vv, 14, 15, 7.

of the Muhammadan and British periods. So far as political history was concerned the knowledge was very meagre, and as regards the culture of the Hindus, not much was known to the English writers of Indian history whose number was not very small.

Things were somewhat different as regards Medieval India. The Englishmen had a fair knowledge of the Indian histories written by the Muslims, and had interest in and capacity to write history even in recent times. Henry Vansittart, Governor of Bengal (1760-64), employed Salīmu'l-lah to write the history of Bengal which was translated into English by Francis Gladwin under the title of *A Narrative of Transactions in Bengal*. In 1783 Gladwin wrote his History of Hindustan during the reigns of Jahāngir, Shāhjahān and Aurangzib. Ghulām Husain Salim wrote in Persian the *Riyāzu's-Salātīn* in 1200 A.H. (A.D. 1787-88) at the request of his English employer. It mainly deals with the history of the Muslim rule in Bengal with a short introductory section on the Hindu period which is full of absurd tales, myths and legends and worthless as history. A more important historical work, also in Persian, was written by Syed Ghulām Husain Khān Tabātabā'i in 1780. The scope of the work is best described in the full title of the book given by the author, of which a part reads as follows:

“*Siyar U'l Mutākherīn* or View of Modern Times being an History of India from 1118 to 1194 (A.H. = A.D. 1707 to 1780). . . and in particular an account of the English Wars in Bengal to which the author has added a critical examination of the English Government and policy in those countries.”

This book may be regarded as the latest and at the same time the best history of India written by an Indian before the modern historiography made its influence felt in this country. As such it is not without interest to quote the views of the author about the nature, object, and importance of writing history, which truly reflects the tradition handed down by the Medieval or Muslim historians of India. History, in his opinion, gives us a ‘glimpse into the most glorious part of the Creator’s performance’, affords information about different races of mankind, an insight into their institutions and good qualities of their principal leaders, as well as into the actions of their followers, so that examples of the meanness, of insolence

and of oppression may put others on their guard and reclaim them from their shameful conduct. As no one had till then written the history of India since the death of Aurangzib, the author selected this period in order to supply the missing link in the long chain of events in the past history of India.⁷

Unfortunately there was no trace of this distinctive trait of Muslim culture, viz. an inherent tendency to record past events, in India, during the nineteenth century. The tradition was, however, kept up by Englishmen. The oldest work that merits attention is *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the year 1745* by Robert Orme (1728-1801), published in 1764. He was educated at Harrow, came to Calcutta in 1742, entered the East India Company's service in 1743, became a member of the Council at Madras (1754-58), and was the historiographer to the East India Company from 1769 to 1801. In addition to the book mentioned above, he published in 1782 another work named *Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English Concerns in Indostan from the year M. DC. LIX*. It may be added that to the first mentioned book of his was also prefixed 'A Dissertation on the Establishments made by Muhammadan Conquerors in India'.

As he was a contemporary of the events recorded in the first book, it possesses great historical value even today as a source book, and many subsequent writers freely drew information from it. His ideas on the Mughals and Marathas were derived, partly from personal investigation but mainly from hearsay and secondary sources. Being a foreigner he could not form any clear conception on the subject and his statements are not of much historical value now. It is, however, worthy of note that Orme was inspired by ideas of modern historiography and collected considerable source materials, in the shape of printed books and tracts and manuscripts, which are now preserved in the India Office Library. There is no doubt that he had studied some of the chronicles written by Muslim historians during the Medieval Age, for he gives a brief but fair outline of the Muslim ruling dynasties in India from the invasion of Sind by Muhammad ibn Kāsīm in A.D. 708. He had no idea of

⁷English translation of *Seir Mutakherin*, by M. Raymond, published by R. Cambray & Co. (1902), pp. 24-5.

the Hindu period and his brief account is prefaced by the following remark: "The Indians have lost all memory of the ages in which they began to believe in Vishnu, Isvara, Brahma and a hundred thousand divinities subordinate to these. . . . The history of these gods is a heap of the greatest absurdities."⁸ This statement probably represents the general knowledge of the history and culture of the Hindus possessed by Englishmen about the middle of the eighteenth century.

Towards the end of this century an attempt was made by another historian, William Robertson, to collect information of Ancient India preserved in the works of the classical writers. His book, *Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India*, was published in 1792. He begins with Alexander's expedition and refers to the rise and fall of the Greek domination in Bactria and North-Western India. He then adds that since that time the only intercourse between India and the Western countries was through trade, and gives some account of it. In an Appendix he makes "observations upon the genius, the manners and institutions of the people of India". It is needless to add that he possessed very little authentic knowledge of India beyond what he found in the accounts of the Classical Writers. Some idea of the archaic character of his views may be formed from the fact that he identified Palibothra, the capital of Sandrocottus, i.e. the Maurya Candragupta, with the city of Allahabad, though there is no doubt today that it occupied the site where stands the city of Patna, capital of Bihar.

The first great historian of India was James Mill (1773-1836), father of John Stuart Mill and friend of Bentham, Ricardo, Joseph Hume and George Grote. He was a prolific writer, held very pronounced views on political economy, utilitarianism and other subjects, and is regarded as the founder of Philosophic Radicalism, though he was definitely against the application of his advanced views to India. He began his *History of British India* in 1806 and completed it in 1818. Few historical books on India have received such high encomium or maintained popularity over such a long period as this work. Macaulay referred to it as "the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of

⁸Edition of 1803, p. 2.

Gibbon.”⁹ It earned a reputation as the standard history of India immediately after its publication in 1818 and continued as a textbook in Indian Universities for more than a century. But it had its adverse critics also, both among Indians and Englishmen. The former resented his denunciations of ancient Indian culture, which were clearly due to both ignorance and racial prejudice, and the latter did not like his harsh criticism of the British rulers like Warren Hastings. Judging at this distance of time, one cannot but admit that though Mill’s book had great faults, it had also high merits, and he should justly be regarded as a great historian with modern ideas of historiography, so far at least as the history of the British period is concerned. His treatment of the history of the Hindu, Muslim and the British period is of very unequal merits and must be discussed separately. As this remark applies to many other historians of India in modern times, it would be better from this stage of our discussion to treat separately the histories of the three periods of India even though they were sometimes written by the same person, and included in one and the same book.

So far as Ancient India is concerned, the knowledge of its history even among the learned Hindus was not only meagre but sometimes even ridiculous. This would be quite evident from one or two examples. When the Fort William College was founded in A.D. 1800 for giving instructions to the officers of the East India Company on India, a teacher of the College and Chief Pandit of the Supreme Court, named Mrityunjay Sharma, prepared a historical text in Bengali which was published in 1808. Even a cursory glance at this work would convince anybody that it has absolutely no historical value. Leaving aside the legendary kings who ruled in the three epochs known as Satya, Tretā and Dvāpara *Yugas* for more than thirty-eight lakhs of years, it refers to the royal dynasties ruling during the four thousand nine hundred and five years which had elapsed since the beginning of the Kali age. One hundred and nineteen Hindu kings sat on the throne of Delhi during the first four thousand two hundred and sixty-seven years. Among these Yudhiṣṭhira and Mahānandi are referred

⁹Statement made in the course of the debate in the House of Commons on the Charter Act of 1833. Quoted by Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

to in the Purāṇas. But among the names of kings that follow and are said to have ruled for more than two thousand years, only Vikramāditya is known in legends, and the last king Pṛthu may stand for Pṛthvirāja. But all the other names such as Samudrapāl, Premdevī, Hariprem Vairāgī Dhīsen, Dvīpa Sena, Jīvan Simha, etc., are absolutely unknown from any other source. In the detailed account that follows, Ballālasena, known to have been a king of Bengal, is said to have sat on the throne of Delhi.

The source of this curious history seems to have been a Sanskrit manuscript which I found in the Dacca University collection. Both of these are worthless from the point of view of history, but their importance lies in the fact that they fairly indicate the amount of knowledge or rather ignorance, at least in Bengal, regarding the Hindu period of Indian history. In view of this we need hardly be surprised at the ignorance of Ancient Indian history displayed by Robert Orme and William Robertson, the two oldest writers on Indian history. But they clearly confessed their ignorance rather than rely on silly legends like the two Hindu writers mentioned above.

The ground for a more accurate knowledge of Ancient Indian history began to be laid towards the end of the eighteenth century by European scholars. They followed in the footsteps of those who had made similar attempts to recover the history and culture of Greece such as Winckelmann, Zoga, Wolf, and a host of other scholars in the eighteenth century. These scholars surveyed the art and antiquities as well as the literature of the Ancient World in a critical spirit. They had, however, one great advantage which was denied to the European Indologists, namely the existence of political history written by the ancient Greeks. Unfortunately, India had no Herodotus or Thucydides; so, the European Indologists first turned their attention to the study of the cultural history of India. The foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in 1784 by Sir William Jones marks the beginning of an organized attempt in this direction which bore fruit. When James Mill wrote his *History of British India* and prefixed to it an account of the ancient period, Indological research in Ancient Indian culture had not proceeded very far, but enough had already been written to give a fair idea of the high degree

of cultural development of the Hindus in the ancient period. In particular Mill had before him the carefully studied writings of William Jones and his colleagues expressing a high degree of admiration for Hindu culture and civilization. But Mill had a supreme contempt not only for these early Indologists but also for those European travellers who had first-hand knowledge of countries in East Asia and highly praised the culture and civilization of the peoples. He denounced the Jesuit who visited China and propagated "the most hyperbolic ideas of the arts, the sciences and institutions of the Chinese". He was surprised that "even to Voltaire, a keen-eyed and sceptical judge, the Chinese, of almost all nations, are the objects of the loudest and most unqualified praise".¹⁰

Similarly, regarding India he observes: "It was unfortunate that a mind so pure, so warm in the pursuit of truth, and so devoted to oriental learning, as that of Sir William Jones, should have adopted the hypothesis of a high state of civilization in the principal countries of Asia."¹¹

He then advances two arguments in support of his rejecting the views of Sir William Jones. The first may be stated in his own words:

"Beside the illusions with which the fancy magnifies the importance of a favourite pursuit, Sir William was actuated by the virtuous design of exalting the Hindus in the eyes of their European masters; and thence ameliorating the temper of the Government."¹²

This is a gratuitous assumption and not an argument worth serious consideration. The second argument is positively ludicrous. He points out the vast difference between the professions and practice of the Hindus, as described by the travellers themselves: "In the same breath that they extol the wonderful strength of filial piety they speak of the common practice of exposing infants; the strict morality and ceremonious conduct of the people are followed by a list of the most gross debaucheries", etc.¹³ It is forgotten by Mill that

¹⁰James Mill, *The History of British India*, Fifth Ed. (1858), Vol. II, p. 108.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*, f.n., 2.

the existence of evils, which are of comparatively recent growth or confined to small sections in a vast population, does not necessarily detract from the high standard of morality for which an ancient society might be justly famous. He also forgets — and this is the more inexcusable — that Sir William Jones refers to the dim past of a society from the evidence of authentic literature belonging to a remote past, which is not affected by the degenerate condition of the same society which we witness today after the lapse of two thousand years. Following the same argument one would be fully justified in dismissing as myth the stories of the greatness of Greek and Roman civilizations by considering the condition of Greece and Italy in the eighteenth century. But Mill was not prepared to believe that like the Romans and Greeks of the present day the Hindus were formerly in a “state of high civilization.” He believes that it was a “gratuitous assumption” and a theory “invented to preserve a pre-established and favourite creed”—“it was not an inference from what was already known.”¹⁴ In other words, Mill, who probably had never studied the original sources of information about Ancient Indian civilizations, rejected the views of William Jones who did.

The following observations of Mill about the Hindus, to which many others of similar import may be added from his long rambling dissertation on the Hindu culture, serve as an excellent illustration of the fact that in truth, the eminent historian of British India fully lays himself open to the charge which he has falsely brought against Jones.

“Their laws and institutions are adapted to the very state of society which those who visit them now behold, . . . such as could neither begin, nor exist, under any other than one of the rudest and weakest states of the human mind. As the manners, the arts and sciences of the ancient Hindus are entirely correspondent with the state of their laws and institutions, everything we *know* of the ancient state of Hindustan conspires to prove that it was rude.”¹⁵

Mill lays emphasis on the word ‘know’ in the above extract and it may be quite true if we assume that he knew practically nothing of the ancient Hindus. But his colossal ignorance he sought to cover under specious arguments like the following:

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 115.

"If the Hindus had ever been placed in this pretended state of civilization, we know of no such period of calamity, as was sufficient to reduce them to a state of ignorance and barbarity."¹⁶ This one sentence is enough to prove that if Mill had little knowledge of the ancient Hindus, he knew much less of the medieval and practically nothing of the Hindus of his own time.

In forming a comparative estimate, Mill declares that the "people of Europe, even during the feudal ages, were greatly superior to the Hindus".¹⁷ Proceeding further he observes: "In truth, the Hindu like the Eunuch, excels in the qualities of a slave."¹⁸ A few lines further on he remarks: "In the still more important qualities, which constitute what we call the moral character, the Hindu ranks very low."¹⁹ After all this, it scarcely surprises us to be told that "it will not admit of any long dispute, that human nature in India gained, and gained very considerably, by passing from a Hindu to a Mohammadan government."²⁰

No comment of mine is necessary upon this extraordinary anti-Hindu outburst of a British historian of repute. It would suffice to quote a part of the comments of the great Oriental scholar, Horace Hayman Wilson, who brought out a new edition of Mill's History with notes and continued Mill's narrative from the year 1805, where it ended, to the year 1835.

Referring to Mill's views regarding the superiority of Muslims to the Hindus, as mentioned above, Wilson added the following note at the end of Volume II of Mill's History.

"This superior intellectual advancement of the Mohammedan nations, so confidently asserted, as a fact, is no fact at all, nor has any proof of it been adduced. The analogies upon which it is based, have been shown to be inaccurate, and the comparison involves a total disregard of time and circumstance. The question formerly discussed, was not what the Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Hindus now are, but what they were. Admitting that the three former have attained since the eighth century a level with the Hindus, it may most confidently be denied that the Arabs before the time of the Khalifat, or the Turks before that of Jangiz, were on a par with Hindu

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 366.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 342.

civilization. It would be equally consistent to assert, that because the progress made by the inhabitants of Great Britain, has left the Hindus behind; therefore the Britons in the days of Caesar were more civilized than the people of India."²¹

It is unnecessary after all this to consider in detail the views expressed by Mill regarding the Hindus in Book II of his *History* covering more than five hundred printed pages. They deal with the chronology and ancient history, classification in society, form of government, the laws, the taxes, religion, manners, arts, and literature of the Hindus, and their general purport may be guessed from the general reflections, based on them, from which a few passages have been quoted above. Mill has nothing but supreme contempt for those who find any indication of civilization in any of these branches of the achievement of the Hindus. It would be difficult to name another book, written by one possessing eminent qualifications as a historian, in which so much prodigious labour has been misdirected to produce a historical work which by any canon of criticism does not deserve the name. It is specially worthy of note that while Orme and Robertson confessed their ignorance and did not attempt the task, Mill should have gone out of his way to prefix to his subject proper a study, for which he possessed very poor equipment. If Mill as a historian did not brilliantly shine forth in the main part of his book dealing with British India, one might be tempted to quote the well-known proverb — fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

But Mill was certainly not a fool, and the question therefore arises how to account for his voluminous dissertation on the Hindus which brings such discredit upon his reputation as a historian. No definite answer can be given — but the only rational explanation seems to be that Mill suffered from a strong dose of racial prejudice, and this sentiment, fed by his ignorance of the subject, dissuaded him from acquiring or appreciating even such knowledge as was within his reach, however small it might be.

It is fortunate that the great defects of Mill in the treatment of Ancient Indian history, as noted above, do not appear in the subsequent writings of Europeans on Indian history such as

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 374.

Sir John Malcolm's *Political History of India* published in 1826. Peter Auber, in his book, *Rise and Progress of the British Power in India*, published in 1837, refers to the Hindu period, but devotes only one page to it. He simply mentions Alexander's invasion after which we are told that India "remained comparatively secure until the irruption of the Moslems . . . that scourge of the human race." It is significant that Auber who wrote his book during the lifetime of Mill differed radically from him both in his attitude towards the Muslims and his frank confession of ignorance about the history of the Hindus.

Two years after Auber's book was published appeared the *History of India* by Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859). It was first published in 1839²² and dealt with only the Hindu and Muhammadan periods. Elphinstone came out to India in 1795 at the age of 16 as a Writer in the East India Company's service and held many important administrative and diplomatic posts in different parts of India till he retired from his office as Governor of Bombay in 1827. His *History of India* was hailed as a great work, for which he was called the Tacitus of modern India.

Elphinstone had an intimate personal knowledge of the Hindus and made an assiduous study of the available literature on Indian history. He was well acquainted with the development of modern historiography and could easily distinguish fables and legends from genuine history. He is the first historian of India who felt the need of a chronological framework for the history of Ancient India. Unfortunately, the available data were very inadequate, and the small success that he achieved is truly remarkable. He dismissed the traditional Hindu conception of the four *yugas* extending over a period of more than four million years and started the history of the Hindus from the oldest fixed point known till then, namely the compilation of the R̥gveda, which he fixed at the fourteenth century before Christ, a conclusion which does not differ materially from the general consensus of opinion on the subject held at the present day. His attempt to fix the later chronology with the help of the lists of kings given in the Purāṇas is also a characteristically modern method, and for both of these he was

²²This date is given by Cowell who edited the book in 1866. But Buckland, in his *Dictionary of Biography*, gives the date as 1841.

indebted to the writings of Sir William Jones and Horace Hayman Wilson. He was also acquainted with the decipherment of Aśoka's inscriptions in 1837 by James Prinsep — an epoch-making discovery which for the first time placed the chronology of ancient India on a scientific basis. This decipherment, after a strenuous effort of seven years, was a direct result of the development of historiography in Europe, which at this time realized the importance of inscriptions in reconstructing ancient history. Armed with all these contributions made by a group of Indologists, Elphinstone had no difficulty in fixing approximately the date of Candragupta Maurya's accession towards the end of the fourth century B.C. Then, counting backwards and forwards from this one fixed point, he determined the approximate dates of the royal dynasties mentioned in the Purāṇas from the *Mahābhārata* War to the age of the Guptas in the fourth century A.D. This very process of fixing the chronology of Ancient India is followed even today, and the approximate datings of Elphinstone are not materially different from what is now generally accepted, though some modifications have been rendered necessary by archaeological discoveries of coins and inscriptions during the long period of more than a century and a quarter that has elapsed since the days of Elphinstone.

Beyond a bare enumeration of the succession of royal dynasties on the basis of the Purāṇas Elphinstone has not made any attempt to narrate the political history of Ancient India. It is difficult to explain why he did not refer in some detail to the conquests of Alexander, and the achievements of Candragupta Maurya and Aśoka — important topics, a general account of which is supplied by classical writers, Indian literature, and the newly discovered inscriptions of Aśoka, all of which were known to him. His treatment of political history is very meagre and somewhat uncritical even if we make due allowance for the scanty data available in his time. But he showed a deep appreciation of modern historiographical method by laying great stress on the cultural achievement of the Hindus. He has given long accounts of the administrative system, society, religion, literature, philosophy, arts and science, manners and customs, and trade and commerce, of the Hindus, and has shown a true historical instinct by tracing their gradual

changes in successive chronological periods. He also noted the distinction between North and South India in these respects, as Aryan culture penetrated into the south at a considerably later date, and came into contact with the Dravidian culture which was already a highly developed one. Elphinstone also gives a brief outline of the political history of India south of the Narmada river. What is still more interesting is the description of the oversea trade and maritime activities of the Hindus and their colonization of Java, Bali and other islands.

On the whole, it must be admitted that Elphinstone made a critical use of the available historical materials, and the foundations of the cultural history of Ancient India were well and truly laid by him. This probably explains why, in spite of its obvious errors of omission and commission, and the archaic character of many of its statements, Elphinstone's *History of India* continued to be prescribed as a textbook in the Universities for a long time. We may gather some idea of the value attached to this book from a note in the *History of India* written by John Clark Marshman. In the preface to the edition of this book published in 1867 occurs a notice to the effect that the Syndicate of the University of Calcutta intimated to the author that they had adopted Mr. Elphinstone's standard work in reference to the Hindu and Muhammadan periods and desired the present work to commence where he left off, with the History of the British empire in India. As a matter of fact, Elphinstone's *History of India* was prescribed as a textbook even when I was a student in the first decade of this century, though as a corrective and supplement, V. A. Smith's *Early History of India*, which deals only with the political history of Ancient India, was added to it. The Hindu period in Elphinstone's *History of India* marks the end of the first stage of the development of modern historiography and the beginning of another which will be discussed in my next lecture.

It has not been possible, within the short compass of a lecture, to refer to many British historians of India who were contemporaries of Elphinstone or shortly followed him. In spite of the defects and shortcomings of their works, more or less common in those days, they have been of great help in the development of historiography in the subsequent period.

In particular, many of them have noted new events and supplied minute details of those otherwise known, from their personal knowledge. Much of this valuable data has been omitted from later historical texts, perhaps because they ceased to be of living interest, or economy of space made it necessary to omit it in order to make room for more recent events which were naturally regarded as of far greater importance in the lifetime of their authors. Thus even today many of these books would prove very useful to those who would make a special study of Indian history during the first half of the nineteenth century. They also supply many interesting contemporary views of men and things which we miss in later writings, but seem to be of great value in making a proper historical assessment of many events and personalities associated with them.

These books may be divided into two classes, viz. General and Regional. To the first category belong:

1. *Political History of India from 1784 to 1823*, by Sir John Malcolm (1826), in two volumes; and the following three books by R. Montgomery Martin:
2. *History of the Possessions of the Honourable East India Company*, in two volumes (1837).
3. *History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, in three volumes (1838).
4. *The Indian Empire — its History, Topography, Government, Finance, Commerce and Staple products with a full account of the Mutiny of Native Troops and an Exposition of the Social and Religious state of one hundred million subjects of the Crown of England*.

To the second category belong a number of books which were long regarded as standard authorities on the subject and formed the main source of information of subsequent writers. Chief among these are:

1. *Account of Assam*, compiled by Francis Buchanan Hamilton (1807).
2. *History of the Mahrattas*, by James Grant Duff (1826).
3. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, by James Tod (1829-32).

4. *History of Bengal*, by Marshman (1838).
5. Stirling's *History of Orissa* (1846).
6. Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs* (1849) which partially superseded two earlier books on the subject, one written by James Brown (1788), the first Englishman to write the history of the Sikhs, and another written by MacGregor on the same subject in two volumes published in 1846.

The list is by no means exhaustive, but is sufficiently long to show the keen interest taken by Europeans, mostly British, in the history of India, and to make us appreciate the deep debt of gratitude we owe to these foreign writers for the development of historiography in India before the middle of the nineteenth century.

Second Lecture

Development of Indian Historiography since the Middle of the Nineteenth Century

THE SECOND stage in the development of historiography of Ancient India was ushered in by more or less the same process as that which had proved so successful in re-writing the histories of Greece and Rome, and discovering the histories of ancient Egypt and South-West Asia. The chief elements of this process were:

- (i) Critical study of the books and documents.
- (ii) Discovery and study of the old inscriptions and monuments by archaeological explorations and excavations.

As regards the first, organized attempts were made both by Government and private individuals and institutions to make regular search for old manuscripts and publish descriptive catalogues of them. At the same time, the task of preparing and publishing critical editions of important texts, and in many cases their English translations, was seriously taken up by individuals and institutions. Sir William Jones was a pioneer in this field. He translated the *Manu Samhitā* and founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in 1784 which became the centre of organized research. Hundreds of articles on Indian antiquities were published in the Journals of the Society, and a large number of important books bearing upon Ancient Indian history and culture were published in the *Bibliotheca Indica* series — both of which continue to this day.

A number of scholars followed in the footsteps of Sir William Jones, among whom particular mention may be made of Colebrooke, Wilson and Burnouf. But the chief credit for revealing the past history of India goes to the German scholars. Though Colebrooke, a mathematician, made the Europeans acquainted with the Veda as early as 1805, he failed to realize

its importance and thought that its study "would hardly reward the labour of the reader, much less that of the translator."¹ Burnouf traced the connection between the languages of the *R̥gveda* and the *Zend Avesta* and demonstrated the position of Sanskrit in the history of the Aryan nations. The study was taken up by the German scholars, and Bopp, Grimm and Humboldt established the intimate relationship among all Aryan languages, the most primitive form of which has been preserved in the language of the *R̥gveda*. The editions and translations of the different Vedic texts were taken up by other scholars, but the crowning achievement was that of Friedrich Max Müller, a German scholar settled in England, who edited the whole text of the *R̥gveda* with the commentary of Sāyana. He also wrote in 1859 his *History of Sanskrit Literature*, in which all the Sanskrit texts known till then were mapped out in chronological order. Another outstanding achievement of Max Müller was the founding of the *Sacred Books of the East* series which made available in English translation the rich store of source materials preserved in Sanskrit and Sanskritic languages. His example was followed in later times by the Pali Text Society and various other religious associations and publishing firms.

The first attempt to utilize these newly discovered materials in the form of a regular history of Ancient India was made by Christian Lassen (1800-1876) whose great work, *Indische Alterthumskunde* (Knowledge of Indian Antiquities), in four volumes, was published between 1847 and 1861. He also founded the famous German antiquarian periodical, *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, in 1837, and edited it till 1850. It is still current, and along with Weber's *History of Sanskrit Literature* and the periodical publication, *Indische Studien* (Indian Studies), made the results of German research and scholarship familiar to the learned world.

Side by side with the Brahmanical literature, Buddhist and Jaina texts were edited or translated by Fausböll and Jacobi, and Oldenberg's treatise on Buddhism held the field for many years. A few Indian scholars also took up the work of translating ancient texts. Rammohan Roy translated some

¹Quoted in 'Introduction' to R. C. Dutt's *History of Civilization in Ancient India* (1889).

Upaniṣads, and at a later date Pandit Dayananda Sarasvati translated the *Rgveda* into Hindi, but they did not keep up to the critical standard of the European scholars mentioned above.

The influence of these studies on historiography is illustrated by the work of Henry Beveridge, *A Comprehensive History of India, Civil, Military, and Social, from the first Landing of the English to the Suppression of the Sepoy Revolt, including an outline of the Early History of Hindostan*. It was published in 1865 and divided into three volumes. He claims in the Preface that though a number of works relating to India have appeared, his work differs from them in plan and was written after due research and with strict impartiality.

This claim is not altogether unjustified. He had a very poor idea of Hindu culture, but this was mainly due to ignorance rather than racial prejudice. His difference from Mill will be clear from the following passage in the Preface of the book: "Hinduism, though little better than a tissue of obscene and monstrous fancies, not only counts its domination by thousands of years, but can boast of having had among its votaries, men who, in the ages in which they lived, extended the boundaries of knowledge, and carried some of the abstrusest of the sciences to a height which they had never reached before."

Even in dealing with the British period Beveridge followed more faithfully the true principles of modern historiography than even such noted historians as Elliot and V. A. Smith. As will be shown later, he was free from the imperial sentiments which influenced the above two and many others, even while writing the history of Medieval and Ancient India. In dealing with the British period, Beveridge took the attitude of a judge rather than that of an advocate while discussing the merit of various actions taken by the Governors-General. This is best seen in his attitude towards Hastings's treatment of Nanda Kumar and the annexation of Native States like Awadh by Dalhousie. To these more detailed reference will be made in my next lecture.

I may now continue the story of further discoveries of source materials which introduced a new phase in the development of historiography after Beveridge. While the efforts of scholars brought to light the rich literary sources of Ancient Indian

history, another great source of materials was slowly revealing itself before the historians. This is the discovery of inscriptions scattered all over India. Such inscriptions came to light also in other parts of the world, especially in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but for thousands of years they remained merely obscure symbols whose meaning and significance were absolutely unknown. But here, again, European scholarship succeeded in removing the obscurity after prolonged persistent efforts. Lack of time would not permit me to tell the long and romantic story of how Hieroglyphics in Egypt were deciphered by Champollion in the twenties of the nineteenth century and the last stage of the decipherment of the Cuneiform inscriptions in Western Asia was successfully accomplished by Rawlinson in 1851, after endeavours of more than a century.

When scholars in Europe were busy with these tasks, James Prinsep (1799-1840), Assay-master at the Calcutta Mint from 1832 to 1838, engaged himself in the study of a series of inscriptions in unknown characters carved on rocks, pillars and railings of *stūpas*. He had collected a large number of facsimiles of these inscriptions in unknown alphabets, and for seven years it was his habit, every morning after breakfast, to spread them on the table and to gaze and gaze at them — always haunted by the fear that some German scholars would get the better of the English, by deciphering them. At last the key to the solution suddenly dawned upon him, and he deciphered the Brāhmī alphabet in which all these inscriptions were written. As all the modern Indian alphabets were developed from this Brāhmī in regular stages of evolution, the inscriptions of all ages and localities in India could be easily read. They not only supplied valuable contemporary records of ancient Indian history, hitherto almost wholly lacking, but also furnished a good means of approximately dating them. Thus, for the first time, the historians of Ancient India got a solid core of facts, arranged in chronological order, and the evidence of inscriptions was supplemented by ancient coins and monuments. All these were mostly recovered by systematic archaeological explorations and excavations undertaken by the Government of India. These first took definite shape under Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) who arrived in India as a cadet in 1833 and retired from the army as Major-General in 1861.

He was then made the first Archaeological Surveyor, and served in this capacity from 1861 to 1865 when the Department was abolished. When it was revived in 1870, Cunningham was appointed Director and held this post till 1885. Cunningham was not only the technical expert in carrying out excavations, but his reports of annual tours contained notes and discussions on many historical matters. Apart from this, he wrote the *Ancient Geography of India*, published two volumes on the two great *stūpas* of Sanchi and Bharhut, and edited the Aśoka Inscriptions. The Archaeological Department was reorganized and put on a permanent and much better footing by Lord Curzon, and it is still carrying on its useful activities.

Although Cunningham and his successors were not professional historians, they have contributed more to the development of authentic history of Ancient India than the latter by making available to them the materials dug up by spades from the bowels of the earth. It is a common saying that the pen is mightier than the sword, but in the case of Indological studies even a spade, not to speak of a sword, has proved mightier than the pen. For much in the written documents has been discredited, disproved or cast into shade by the archaeological discoveries.

The critical edition and discussion of old literary works bearing upon the history and culture of Ancient India, and the study of inscriptions, coins and monuments of the period, joined with the developed ideas of historiography imported from the West, ushered in the third stage in the development of historiography of Ancient India, the main feature of which is an attempt to reconstruct the authentic history according to the approved scientific method with the help of the new source materials mentioned above. The early successful attempts in this direction, before the end of the nineteenth century, were made by J. F. Fleet and R. G. Bhandarkar in the domain of political history of the Deccan, and by R. C. Dutt in the cultural history of India as a whole. The *Dynasties of Kanarese Districts* (1896) and the *Early History of the Deccan* (1895), respectively, by the first two, are still regarded as models of political history, while these two, as well as *A History of Civilization in Ancient India* by R. C. Dutt (1889), have been rendered somewhat out of date by later discoveries of new materials.

So far as the history of Medieval India is concerned, the development of historiography shows a close resemblance to that in Europe. For, corresponding to the Medieval Chronicles of Europe there were chronicles of all the Muslim ruling dynasties in India. The *Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri* by Minhāju'd-dīn, composed in 1259-60, traced the history of Muslim rule in India up to that period. Baranī continued the history of Muslim rule in India from the point where Minhāju'd-dīn stopped till the sixth regnal year of Firūz Tughluq. For Firūz Tughluq we have a short history by the Emperor himself and another anonymous historical work, *Sīr'āt-i-Firūz Shāhī*. For the Mughal period we have either the biography or autobiography of the first six Emperors, and official histories like *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* and *Akbar-nāma*. For the intervening period we have *Tarīkh-i-Mubārak Shāhī*, *Tarīkh-i-Sher Shāhī*, and a number of other chronicles. There were also general histories like *Futūhu's Salatīn*, *Tarīkh-i-Ferishtā*, etc. There was thus a plethora of historical works on Medieval India, offering a refreshing contrast to the striking paucity of such books dealing with Ancient India. It is beyond the scope of the present lectures to discuss in detail the value of these medieval histories. It would suffice to state that the conception of history by their authors was, generally speaking, very high. Baranī expressed his idea as follows: "The compiler of history must be a man of trust, veracity and impartiality. If he records the virtues of a king or a celebrated personality, he should not hide his vices and weaknesses. The historian must, on the basis of religion, belief, truth and conscience, be a recorder of truth and truth alone."

How far Baranī was true to his professions is another matter; for like almost all medieval historians he deviated from this noble ideal for fear of displeasing his royal patron and other causes. To him, history was an element of divine truth, had a didactic religious purpose, and was a branch of ethics. So he twisted facts for moral reasons, and sometimes did not regard the past as it was, but as it ought to have been according to his own ideas. Similarly, Abū'l Fazl also professed a high regard for truth, but has been accused not merely of flattery but even of wilful concealment of facts.

The manuscripts of most of these books, written in Persian, were available to European historians in the eighteenth century,

and Elliot's monumental work *History of India as told by its own Historians*, in eight volumes, published between 1867 and 1877, made the English translation of important passages of these texts available to the early English historians. Hence the European scholars who wrote on Indian history had the means of acquiring a far better knowledge of the history of Medieval India than that of Ancient India. It was for this reason that even the earliest English historian of India, namely Orme, who was totally ignorant of Ancient India, possessed a far greater knowledge of the history of the Muslim period, as mentioned above. That is why Mill's treatment of the Muslim period of Indian history marks a distinct advance over that of the Hindu period.

As a matter of fact, the histories of Medieval India, almost up to the end of the nineteenth century, were all based on the Medieval Chronicles, specially Ferishta as translated by Alexander Dow (1768-72), Jonathan Scott (1794), and John Briggs (1829).

But in spite of great advantages it had one defect. The English historians, having ready-made materials before them, were less eager and active to look for new or first-hand source materials, the need for which was thrust upon the historians of Ancient India.

Thus the historiography of Medieval India at the beginning of the nineteenth century had almost reached the stage which that of Ancient India had attained only in the last quarter of that century. But the further development of the historiography of both these periods ran on almost parallel lines. As in the case of Ancient India, the progress in our knowledge of Medieval India was rendered possible by the discovery of new historical texts, critical study and interpretation as well as English translation of these texts, and archaeological explorations and excavations bringing to light coins and inscriptions which enabled the historians to correct, modify, and supplement the information supplied by historical chronicles. The discovery and publication of the accounts written by foreign travellers also enriched our knowledge of both Ancient and Medieval India in more or less the same way.

But in spite of all the initial advantages, the historiography of Medieval India did not show much greater progress than

that of Ancient India by the end of the nineteenth century. No historical works on the political or cultural history of Medieval India, comparable to those of Fleet, Bhandarkar and R. C. Dutt on Ancient India, appeared before the end of the nineteenth century, though Stanley Lane Poole's *Medieval India under Muhammadan Rule*, published in 1903, shows some improvement upon Elphinstone's history of the Muslim period.

It was not till the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that we come across a reaction to the current historiography of Medieval India, which looked upon the medieval historical chronicles as the main, if not the only, source of history, and accepted its data without any critical examination. The new school concentrated its attention on the discovery and collection of original source materials, consisting mainly of contemporary records. This great change is associated with two names, Sir William Irvine and Sir Jadunath Sarkar. Both were distinguished for the zeal, industry, and critical spirit which they displayed in collecting manuscripts and making full use of them. Irvine planned to write the history of the later Mughals from the death of Aurangzīb in 1707 to the capture of Delhi by the English in 1803. He began the work in 1890 and was so conscientious in reading all available manuscript sources and scrutinizing every detail that in twelve years he did not get beyond the history of 1738, though he had collected materials up to that of 1759. But he had to suspend the work in order to prepare his monumental edition of Niccolao Manucci's *Travels in the Mughal Empire* which entailed seven years of hard labour, and also to write his scholarly monograph, *The Army of the Indian Moghuls* (1903). As a result, when he died in 1911, the narrative had been brought down only to the year 1738.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar, who edited Irvine's incomplete work (1922), himself continued the story of the Mughals from the point where Irvine left it, in his *Nādir Shāh* (1922) and *Fall of the Mughal Empire* in four Volumes (1950). But his *magnum opus* was the *History of Aurangzeb* in five volumes (1912-24) which is virtually a history of North India for nearly a century. A byproduct of this was his masterpiece, *Shivaji* (1919), which is regarded by some as the best of his books. He began his career as a historian, almost about the same time as Irvine,

in the nineties of the last century. He had fortunately a long life of 88 years from 1870 to 1958, more than six decades of which he devoted to the pursuit of historical studies. He set a new example in India of hunting for first-hand original documents from various sources, and undertook long and tedious journeys not only for this purpose, but also to make himself familiar with the geography of the localities associated with his history. He checked every detail and every document with meticulous care. The tribute which Jadunath Sarkar paid to Irvine as a historian² may be taken as a description admirably befitting Jadunath himself: "As a historian his most striking characteristics were a thoroughness and an accuracy unsurpassed even by the Germans. His ideal was the highest imaginable. A historian ought to know everything, and, though that is an impossibility, he should never despise any branch of learning to which he has access. He brought light to bear on his subject from every possible angle — English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Persian, Sanskrit, Rajasthani and Marathi records, the State papers and contemporary or nearly contemporary records of every description. As a conscientious writer he gave exact reference for every statement." Jadunath was a historian of the Mughal Empire from Aurangzib to Shāh 'Ālam II, and also of the most brilliant epoch of Maratha history. He also wrote on a variety of topics such as Economics, Religion, Art, Military Art, and excelled in everything which he took up for study. He has justly been compared with Ranke, Niebuhr, and Mommsen, and hailed as the father of modern scientific historiography in India. The credit for its development in the twentieth century to which we shall refer later is justly due to him.

Another contemporary scholar who followed the same line of research was the Maratha historian V. K. Rajawade (1864-1926). He, too, collected original sources and published 22 volumes of original materials for the history of the Marathas, and corrected numerous errors in the current histories of the Marathas written by Duff, Ranade and others. The mass of gossiping Marathi *bakhars* which Duff contemptuously rejected as worthless, formed invaluable materials in the hands of Rajawade, Jadunath Sarkar and Sardesai.

²W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, edited by Jadunath Sarkar, Vol. I, p. xxiv.

So far as the Modern period, or to be more precise, the rule of the British in India, is concerned, the writing of its history started under good auspices. The earlier writers were not professional historians and merely recorded contemporary events or those about which they learnt from persons who lived about the time of their occurrence. But although they never intended to write either the general history of India or of any particular phase or aspect of it, they furnished good materials for the same. These, however, require careful scrutiny before they can be accepted as authentic historical data, for their writers did not always possess critical judgement, and not unoften were either active participants or highly interested in the events they related, and so looked at them from a partisan point of view. Among writers of these types may be mentioned Watts, Bolts, Scrafton, Verelst and Shore.

Of the professional historians reference has been made to James Mill, Auber, Wilson, and Beveridge, and to this list may be added Trotter, who wrote a comprehensive history of the British in India from the very beginning down to their own times. They had the advantage of possessing a great deal of authentic information on this period such as was lacking in respect of the earlier period of Indian history, and profited by the development of historiography in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to which detailed reference has been made in my first lecture.

The progress of Indian historiography in the twentieth century is marked by almost all those characteristic features which formed the basis of European historiography in its most developed stage. As a matter of fact, it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that the Indian historiography imbibed the highest ideals and the best traditions of European historiography, though the actual performance might not have reached the highest, or always maintained the average, standard attained in Europe.

The notable features which characterized the development of historiography in India in the twentieth century may be listed as follows.

Collection of Source Materials

The archaeological explorations and excavations which had begun in the nineteenth century and brought to light valuable

authentic materials for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history were continued and became much more thorough, regular, systematic and extensive in the twentieth century. Coins and inscriptions of the Muslim period were also discovered in large number and helped a great deal to correct the historical chronicles and add to the information contained in them.

The most important archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century were the ruins of Harappā, Mohenjodāro and many other Chalcolithic sites which carried the history of India back to the third millennium B.C., many centuries before the arrival of the Aryans — an event which had hitherto been regarded as marking the beginning of Indian history and culture. Our whole conception of the evolution of Hindu culture was considerably modified by the knowledge of a highly developed pre-Aryan culture on the soil of India.

The collection of manuscripts which had already commenced in the nineteenth century became more systematic and organized, and regular searches undertaken for the purpose in various parts of India brought to light numerous manuscripts bearing upon the culture and history of Ancient and Medieval India. Critical editions and English translations of the more important manuscripts enabled the historians to fully utilize them. Reference may be made in this connection to a few well-known series such as the *Sacred Books of the East*, *Bibliotheca Indica*, and the publications of the Pāli and Jaina canonical texts. One of the latest and most remarkable achievements in this line is the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona. So far as the Muslim and the British periods are concerned, numerous original records, both official and private, have been collected and a portion of them has been published. The extent to which the history of the Muslim period has benefited by such collections may be judged by a comparison of the works of Sir William Irvine, Sir Jadunath Sarkar and G. S. Sardesai on the history of the Mughals and the Marathas with those on the same subject written before them. As specimens of more important works in this line may be mentioned, in addition to Rajawade's collection noted above, *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* completed in 45 volumes, edited by G. S. Sardesai and published by the Bombay Government between 1929 and 1934,

and a new series by way of supplement edited by Dr. P. M. Joshi; two volumes of Persian Records of Maratha history translated into English with notes by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, two collections of Marathi historical letters, originally published by Sane and Parasnis, and a revised edition by Sardesai; and the despatches, newsletters, etc., of several Maratha ruling families and the Rajput State of Jaipur. Reference may also be made to the collection of Assamese Buranjis (with critical edition and translation) and Rajasthani Khyāts and Ballads. These are merely illustrative, and by no means exhaustive.

So far as the British rule is concerned, it is hardly necessary to refer to the collection of records in the National Archives of India in Delhi, and regional archives all over India, the Records of various Residencies, Private papers of different Governors-General, and high British officials, preserved in Britain, more and more of which are now being thrown open to the public, the oldest being Orme's papers and the latest, those of Lord Curzon and Lord Minto. Some valuable collections of State papers have been published by G. Forrest and S. C. Hill, and a series of important collections of papers are being published, under a systematic plan adopted by the Indian Historical Records Commission.

Interpretation of the Materials

The collection of materials described above synchronized with the efforts of a large number of scholars to study critically and interpret the documents with a view to their proper use for the purpose of writing the history of India. These resulted in the publications of books and articles covering the different historical periods in almost all the regions of this vast subcontinent.

Generally speaking, the historians were inspired by the most developed ideals of historiography, and though they are by no means free from defects, these were not so much due to the lack of knowledge and appreciation of these ideals, as to their failure to act up to them due to various reasons. It is to be remembered, however, that this is true not only of historians in, or of, India, but of contemporary historians all over the world. These defects will be considered later in some detail. Here it is only necessary to emphasize two facts. First, the extensive field covered by historians in the twentieth century, and

secondly, that the vast majority of them are Indians. Whereas historians of India in the nineteenth century were mostly Europeans, those of the twentieth century were mostly Indians.

Types of Historical Studies

An idea of the extensive character of historical studies in India may be obtained from the following brief statements about the different types of historical works in the twentieth century.

A. GENERAL HISTORIES OF INDIA

The first attempt of this kind resulted in the *Cambridge History of India* (1922-32). The plan was to devote two volumes each to the Hindu, Muslim and British periods, but the second volume, which was to deal with the Hindu period after first century A.D., has not been published. The last two volumes dealing with the British rule in India formed parts of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*. These do not give any detailed account of the Indian people and their culture.

The Bhāratiya Vidyā Bhavan of Bombay has planned *The History and Culture of the Indian People* in eleven volumes, of which the first six, bringing the history up to A.D. 1526, and two of the last three volumes, dealing with the period from A.D. 1818 to 1947, are already published, and the last volume will be out in 1969^{2a}.

A *Comprehensive History of India* in 12 volumes, with 4 volumes to each of the three periods, was planned by the Indian History Congress, but only the second volume dealing with the period from 325 B.C. to A.D. 300, has been published (1957).

Reference may also be made to a plan initiated by Dr. Rajendra Prasad to compile a history of India in 20 volumes, but the plan was given up after the publication of only one volume dealing with the Gupta Age. Another volume dealing with the Nandas and Mauryas was subsequently published. There are several textbooks dealing with the whole of India written by British as well as Indian scholars. Far more critical are several books dealing with the whole or select periods of Ancient, Medieval, or British India. The best examples are, *The Dynastic History of Northern India* by H. C. Ray (1932, 1936), and *A History of South India* by K. A. N. Sastri (1955).

^{2a}Published in August, 1969.

B. MONOGRAPHS AND REGIONAL HISTORIES

Still more typical of the development of historiography and of the new critical spirit which it introduced were the numerous books dealing with prominent historical persons and dynasties as well as regional histories. We have critical studies of Candragupta Maurya, Aśoka, Harṣavardhana, 'Alāu'd-dīn Khaljī, Muhammad Tughluq, all the Mughul Emperors from Bābur to Aurangzīb, Śivājī, Bājirāo, Haidar 'Alī, and Ranjit Singh, to name only a few.

Less critical are the lives of most of the British Governors-General and many Indian political leaders including Śrī Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

Of the regional and dynastic histories reaching a high standard from every point of view, special mention may be made of the following: Histories of Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Bihar, Kanauj, and Vijayanagara; and of the Guptas, Colas, Pāṇḍyas, Hoysalas, Cālukyas, Rāṣṭrakūṭas, Caulukyas, Gurjara-Pratihāras, Paramāras, Candellas, Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs.

C. THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The Centenary of the Sepoy Mutiny in 1957 led to a more critical study of the subject and several books have been written throwing new light on this very important episode.

The achievement of India's freedom in 1947 has already become a matter of history, and I wrote three volumes on this subject during the years 1962-63, giving a general review of the struggle for freedom till its attainment in 1947. The Government of India has also sponsored a scheme for writing the history of the Freedom Movement in three volumes. The first volume, published in 1961, merely gives a general background of political history and contains hardly anything concerning the struggle for freedom from British yoke. The second volume was published in 1967 just before these lectures were due to be delivered, but no copy was available in Calcutta.³

³This volume "deals with India's reaction to the British impact during the nineteenth century" and, excepting an account of the 'isolated and uncoordinated uprisings culminating in the tragic Revolt of 1857', contains very little having a direct bearing on the Freedom Movement.

D. RESEARCH PAPERS

All these books as well as numerous learned papers read at the meetings of the Indian History Congress, All-India Oriental Conference and Indian Historical Records Commission, or published in such standard journals as *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Calcutta and Bombay, *Indian Antiquary*, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, and Journals of several Universities and historical Societies, indicate the high-water mark of Indian historiography.

But the outlook of Indian historians is no longer confined mainly to political history as was the case in the nineteenth century. The horizon of Indian historiography, like that of the West, has been extended so as to bring within its scope allied branches of study such as the system of administration, including constitutional development in the case of British period, social and economic conditions, and a broad view of cultural development, specially in art, science, religion and literature. These subjects have been included in the regional and dynastic histories as well as in the three general histories of India, published in India in the twentieth century, which have been mentioned above. Special attention has been paid to the economic condition of India under British rule. Following the footsteps of Digby and Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt initiated a regular and critical study of the subject with his two books, *India under Early British Rule* and *India in the Victorian Age*, published respectively in 1901 and 1903. Since then a number of eminent historians have written volumes on this subject, and it is difficult to say whether, at the present moment, political or economic history of India occupies the chief attention of the historians of British India.

The conception of Indian history has been enlarged both in width and depth. As regards the former, the Indian history now includes the study of the expansion of Indian culture and colonization beyond the geographical limits of India, more specially in Central and South-Eastern Asia. This has led further to the study of the cultural influence exercised by India upon the rest of the world, and vice versa.

As regards depth, the gaze of the Indian historians not only penetrates beyond the advent of the Aryans in the second

millennium B.C. to the much earlier Harappā culture in the third or fourth millennium B.C., but to the prehistoric period even beyond that limit. The study of potteries, a new branch of Indian archaeology unknown even in the first quarter of this century, is now assuming greater and greater importance in this connection.

The evidence of pottery is of inestimable value for the prehistoric period, of which no other evidence like coins, inscriptions or architectural monuments, not to speak of written chronicles, is available. As soon as human beings learnt the use of fire for the purpose of cooking food, potteries became a necessary article of their household. Being made of earth and, therefore, not of much value, people never removed them when they left their household, and broken potteries were, of course, thrown away. So these remained where they were used thousands of years before, as mute witness of human settlements in those localities. Fortunately the artistic instincts and skill of men played a great role in the design and painting of the potteries they used, and as these varied in the course of ages, they supply means of roughly fixing the dates when they were made. In this way it is possible to deduce from potteries alone the earliest or latest date of human settlements in deserted old sites.

A very interesting illustration of this, which has some bearing on Indian historiography, is furnished by the potteries unearthed at the site of the old city of Hastināpur (in Meerut District, U.P.) by the archaeological excavation carried out during the years 1950-52. It is narrated in the Purāṇas that this legendary capital city of the Kuru kings of the *Mahā-bhārata* was washed away by the Ganges, on the bank of which it stood, and the ruling king, sixth in descent from Parīkṣit, the grandson of Arjuna, shifted his capital to Kauśāmbī. This was hitherto treated as a mere legend, unsupported by any reliable testimony. But the potteries found during the excavation show that some time between 1100 and 800 B.C. "the occupation of this site came to an end because of a heavy flood in the Gaṅgā which washed away a considerable portion of the settlement."⁴ Many modern historians who are inclined to reject the evidence of the Purāṇas and Epics as mere legends

⁴*Ancient India*, No. 9, 1953, p. 95.

would now be forced to revise their old opinions, and look at these literary sources from a new angle.

This is sure to influence the historiography of Ancient India. We have here another illustration that even the spade, not to speak of the sword, is mightier than the pen.

Third Lecture

Shortcomings in Indian Historiography

HAVING MADE a general review of the development of historiography in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I may now proceed to discuss how far it has maintained the high standard reached in Europe. In order to avoid irrelevant discussion on minor issues, it is necessary to lay down some specific principles which in my opinion should form the basis of judgement on the quality of historical works. I may mention them one by one with short discussions on the validity of each.

1. The first thing necessary is to collect all the available data on a subject on which one is going to write. It is, of course, a counsel of perfection, and in actual practice nobody can be sure that he has really studied all the materials relevant to the discussion of a subject. But what is intended is that no one should neglect, on any ground whatsoever, any particular class of data, or deliberately avoid reference to them, when they go against any preconceived theory or view. This may appear to be a self-evident truth which nobody could possibly hesitate to accept. But this is not always the case. I might cite an actual case to illustrate what I mean. When an organized attempt was made to write the history of Freedom Movement in India, a directive was issued to research workers that they should collect only such data about the outbreak of 1857 as would prove that it was the first war of independence, and not a mutiny of soldiers. The same authority also expressed unwillingness to record the evidence of different groups of revolutionaries on the ground that they would make confusion and so only one particular revolutionary leader belonging to his own group was selected to narrate his experience, while no notice was taken of the rest. A still higher authority, whose multifarious activities also embraced the writing of

history, at first refused to make the least mention of the activities of revolutionaries in connection with the history of the Freedom Movement in India, for India, in his opinion, achieved freedom only by non-violent means, and hence reference to violent activities should not have any place in the history of the Freedom Movement in India. These actual instances, which may be easily multiplied to almost any extent, are cited to show that even such a fundamental principle of history as the consideration of all possible materials relevant to a subject, before one proceeds to write upon it, is in practice not unoften violated when one's mind is obsessed with some preconceived theories.

2. A far more difficult process is the allied problem of a historian's dealing with the evidence of facts collected in the spirit of a judge and not of an advocate. As noted above, expression was given to this view by the Indian historian Kalhana, in the twelfth century, long before it was stressed in modern historiography. This is now generally admitted to be a self-evident truth, but history all over the world, as in India, has perhaps suffered more from failure to observe it in practice than from any other single cause. Illustrations from Indian history will be given later.

3. The next fundamental principle is to have a clear view of the object of writing history. Here the question has been much complicated by stressing quite different things as the ultimate goal of history-writing. Apart from less justifiable aims or objects, such as the demonstration of divine justice, triumph of virtue over vice, a process leading up to the Christian revelation, etc., even learned men have sometimes regarded history as unfolding a definite order, such as the story of human freedom or a cycle of progress and evolution of mankind according to a preconceived notion, and similar things, under the influence of different views of the philosophy of history. But whatever we may think of all these as legitimate objects or purposes of writing history, it is necessary to stress the fact that even admitting that there may be such a thing as philosophy of history, the writing of history should not be tied to its chariot-wheel and undertaken on a preconceived pattern — that the one object it should always keep in view is to record the doings of man with strict accuracy as to facts, and though

adequate and complete evidence is not available in all cases, a historian must, in his reconstruction of the past, aim at the nearest approach to the whole truth that he can attain.

I may express my own views in the matter by quoting those of some eminent historians, regarded with esteem all over the world.

As regards the philosophy of history H. A. L. Fisher, the great author of the *History of Europe*, sums up his view of it as follows:

"One intellectual excitement has, however, been denied me. Men wiser and more learned than I have discovered in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen. This is not a doctrine of cynicism and despair. The fact of progress is written plain and large on the page of history; but progress is not a law of nature. The ground gained by one generation may be lost by the next. The thoughts of men may flow into the channels which lead to disaster and barbarism."¹

"This is a negative approach. But it clears the way for the positive approach to the goal of history which is nothing more and nothing less than that history must be regarded as an eternal quest for truth. This is the primary consideration — the *raison d'être* of history; everything else that may be regarded as history is only secondary and subordinate to it. It is much easier to accept this principle than to adhere to it in both letter and spirit. As I have already mentioned, this was laid down as the first principle of history by both Niebuhr and Ranke, the two great commanding figures in modern historiography. "In laying down the pen", wrote Niebuhr, "We must be able to say in the sight of God, 'I have not knowingly nor without earnest investigation written anything which is not true'."²

¹Preface to his book, *History of Europe*.

²Gooch, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

Ranke supplemented it by the following observation:

“History has had assigned to it the task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of the ages to come. To such lofty functions this work does not aspire. Its aim is merely to show what actually occurred.”³

I take all this to mean that truth, nothing but truth, and as far as possible the whole truth, should form the steel frame of history, on which you may build a structure according to different plots, rhythms, plans or patterns in which you believe according to your philosophy of history. Sir Charles Oman seems to have found fault with Ranke. “A book”, said he, “must bear the impress of the author’s personality, and inevitably of his moral judgement of men and things. The attempt of certain worthy people to push self-restraint so far that they merely record events without commenting on them leads to the production of unreadable books.”⁴ But this is really not in contradiction with what Ranke says. Moral judgement is welcome and even necessary, but only when the facts are established with a scrupulous regard for truth, without any influence of preconceived plan or judgement, and afford sufficient materials for forming a valid judgement.

4. The last and perhaps the most important principle, which is at the same time the most difficult process in the writing of true history, is to make a purely objective approach like a scientist. A historian must divest his mind of sentiments, prejudices and preconceptions, and all kinds of human emotions which are likely to distort his vision and judgement. This is again a counsel of perfection, but must be held up as an ideal, and the merit of a historian is to be judged by the extent to which it has been possible for him to keep to this ideal. As mentioned above, this ideal was also preached, in theory, by the historians in Ancient and Medieval India, though their deviation from it in actual practice is a patent fact. The modern historians likewise fully accept the ideal, but have in many cases violated it in practice.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Preface to his book, *On the Writing of History*. But he agreed with Ranke’s main standpoint. He had no faith, said he, in the “vague theories of Progress and Evolution,” and held that “history is a series of happenings with no inevitability about it” (*ibid.*, p. 130).

It will now be my endeavour to deal in some detail with deviations from the principles mentioned above, in the cases of historians of India in the Modern Age, so that we may form a general view of the merit of their performances.

Reference has been made above to the treatment of ancient Indian history by James Mill who has violated practically all the fundamental principles mentioned above. He has been so much obsessed with prejudices against the Hindus, both on racial and political grounds, that he has deliberately ignored almost all the facts in their favour which were pointed out by Orientalists like Sir William Jones, and has followed the strange logic of judging their past history almost entirely by a consideration of their abject condition at the time when he wrote his history. Consequently he has argued as an advocate and did not form his conclusions like a judge.

That such prejudices about the ancient Hindus influenced English writers even a century later is illustrated by V. A. Smith's *Early History of India*. It is an excellent history, so far as the facts are concerned, and was justly hailed as the first history of Ancient India written on the basis of the results of the latest researches and archaeological explorations. But, not unoften, when, following the principle of Sir Charles Oman, mentioned above, he has passed judgement on the events, we hear the voice of a British member of the Indian Civil Service.

At the end of the chapter on Harṣavardhana he refers to the subsequent history of the Hindu period as "the bewildering annals of Indian petty states when left to their own devices for several centuries."⁵ Yet this period witnessed the growth of the mighty empires of the Pālas and Gurjara Pratihāras, embracing nearly the whole or greater part of Northern India, and that of the Coḷas which extended from Bengal to Cape Comorin and also included overseas dominions across the Bay of Bengal. He was not ignorant of these things, but wanted specifically to impress upon the Indians the supreme benefits of the British rule. For he immediately expresses the hope that these bewildering annals of the petty states "may perhaps serve to give the reader a notion of what India always has been when released from the control of a supreme authority, and what she would be again, if the hand of the benevolent

⁵V. A. Smith, *Early History of India*, 3rd Edition (1914), p. 358.

despotism which now holds her in its iron grasp should be withdrawn.”⁶ This is merely an enlarged version of the laudable object which inspired Sir Henry Elliot to write his history. Elliot, who stands midway between James Mill and Vincent Smith, hoped that the materials he had collected for the Medieval history of India in his eight volumes would “make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule.”⁷ Comment on these is superfluous.

The spirit of British jingo imperialism is also manifest in the general conception of V. A. Smith’s work as well as in stray reflections. In a book dealing with the early history of India from 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan conquest at the end of the twelfth century A.D., 66 pages out of a total of 478 are devoted to the Indian campaign of Alexander the Great, and this is announced in the title of the book, evidently as a specific subject of great importance. The reason for so doing appears from the following observation on the whole campaign: “The triumphant progress of Alexander from the Himalaya to the sea demonstrated the inherent weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European skill and discipline.”⁸ The grotesque nature of this complacent superiority complex would be apparent to anybody who remembers that the expression Himalaya to the sea does not really mean the whole of India as an unwary reader might honestly believe, but covers only the Punjab and Sind, and the greatest Asiatic army which Alexander had to confront in this region was that of Porus who ruled over a kingdom probably not much bigger than a modern district. The defeat of such a petty chief by one of the greatest generals the world has ever seen, wielding the resources of a mighty empire which included Greece, Western Asia and Egypt, is held out by V. A. Smith as an evidence of the *inherent* (mark the word) weakness of the greatest Asiatic armies when confronted with European military skill. But what is amusing, as well as instructive, is that the same V. A. Smith, while describing the discomfiture of Seleucus, the great, if not the greatest, general of Alexander, who ruled from the

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*History of India by its own Historians*, Vol. I, p. xxii.

⁸V. A. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Mediterranean to the Indus, at the hands of Candragupta Maurya, draws no such inference about the relative inherent weakness of the European and Asiatic armies, though the contending parties were more or less on an equal footing on this occasion. It is also worthy of note that while shining in the reflected glory of European Alexander, his terrible and inhuman massacres of men, women, and children in India are narrated by V. A. Smith without a word of comment, far less condemnation. A refreshing contrast is, however, afforded by another historian, Henry Beveridge, whose *Comprehensive History of India, Civil, Military, and Social*, was published in 1865. In the course of his discussion of Alexander's Indian campaign, kept within a reasonable limit of six pages, Beveridge observes:

“The Indian expedition of Alexander cannot be justified on moral grounds. It was dictated by a wild and ungovernable ambition; and spread misery and death among thousands and tens of thousands who had done nothing to offend him, and were peacefully pursuing their different branches of industry, when he made his appearance among them like a destroying demon. Such exploits, once deemed the only avenues to fame, are now judged more wisely; still it is impossible to deny that conquerors were often in early times pioneers of civilization, commerce following peacefully along their bloody track and compensating for their devastation by the blessings which it diffused. Such was certainly the result of the Indian expedition of Alexander.”⁹ Difference between earlier and later generations of British historians is also illustrated by their different attitudes towards the conduct of Warren Hastings, specially in regard to Nanda Kumar. It is well known how the early British historians severely condemned Hastings for having contrived the death of Nanda Kumar on a charge of forgery, in order to save himself from the charges of corruption brought by the latter against him. James Mill says: “No transaction, perhaps, of his whole administration more deeply tainted the reputation of Hastings, than the tragedy of Nun Comar.” According to Macaulay, though the case against Nanda Kumar was instituted by another man, “it was then, and still is, the opinion of everybody, idiots and biographers excepted, that Hastings was the real

⁹Beveridge, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

mover in the business.”¹⁰ Beveridge also wrote articles in 1877-78 condemning Hastings. But in 1885 Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, an advocate, published a big book in support of Hastings and criticized not only Beveridge, who was then a judge of the High Court, but also Mill and Macaulay. In reply Beveridge published in 1886 his book, *Trial of Nanda Kumar, a narrative of judicial murder*.

This controversy brings into limelight the difference between two generations of British historians, and also illustrates the two distinct roles of the historian as judge and an advocate. Sir James Fitzjames Stephen was essentially a lawyer and became the Legal Member of the Supreme Council. His defence of Hastings shows him as an advocate at his best. One of his arguments, which he elaborated at length, is that when Nanda Kumar was tried and hanged, “the events excited no disapproval. No one expressed even an isolated opinion in Nun Comar’s favour. The majority of the council contemptuously refused to stretch out a hand to save him. Such public opinion as there was in Calcutta appears to have been entirely against him.”¹¹

This is an ideal appeal to the Jury to wean their minds of any sympathy towards Nanda Kumar. But, unfortunately, the statements are not only absurd on the face of it but are a string of half-truths or untruths. The real attitude of the majority of the Council towards Hastings may be gathered from their minutes dated 15 September and 21 November, 1775, which contain the following passage quoted by Stephen himself on p. 251 of his book.

“After the death ‘of Nuncumar,’ the Governor, I believe, is well assured that no man who regards his own safety will venture to stand forth as his accuser....

“Though he suffered for the crime of forgery, yet the natives conceive he was executed for having dared to ‘prefer complaints against the Governor-General.... This idea, however destitute of foundation, is prevalent among the natives, and will naturally deter them from making discoveries which may be attended with the same fatal consequences to themselves.

¹⁰Macaulay’s *Essays*, Vol. III, p. 100.

¹¹Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, *The Story of Nuncomar and the Impeachment of Sir Elijah Impey*, Vol. I, p. 249.

Punishment is usually intended as an example to prevent the commission of crimes; in this instance we fear it has served to prevent the discovery of them."

As regards the alleged indifference of the public to the fate of Nanda Kumar, reference may be made to the following account of the execution by the Sheriff quoted on p. 240 of Stephen's book.

"The howlings and lamentations of the poor wretched people who were taking their last leave of him are not to be described, I have hardly recovered from the first shock while I write this about three hours afterwards."

Captain Cowe's evidence, quoted on p. 246 of Stephen's book, also refers to the excitement of the eight or ten thousand people who suddenly dispersed crying '*Ah-baup-are*' (exclamation when they are in great pain) and many of them ran into the river from terror at seeing a Brahman executed in that ignominious manner. Again, Stephen's book (p. 247) quotes the following passage from a letter written by a native gentleman to a Judge of the High Court. "I am told on enquiry that Calcutta was looked upon with horror for several years after the event, but the feeling died out long ago. The statement however that a number of families left Calcutta and settled in Bally in consequence of the execution is quite correct." Now, whatever might be the value of Stephen's opinion about the legality of the sentence passed against Nanda Kumar, the attempt to prove that there was no public sympathy in his favour definitely relegates Stephen to the category of a historian of the type of advocate and not judge.

The histories of India written by British authors suffer from this defect, particularly in relation to the annexation of the dominions of Indian rulers by the British. The general policy of the Government was to give the dog a bad name and then hang it. This is best illustrated by the aggressive imperialism of Governor-General Bentinck in respect of Mysore, Coorg, Cachar, and Jaintia, of Lansdowne against Manipur, of Dalhousie against Awadh and the Punjab, etc. Unfortunately, British historians blindly accepted the official version. V. A. Smith's detailed account of the alleged sins and crimes of the Raja of Coorg, and very brief reference to the annexation of Cachar, Jaintia, Manipur, and Mysore, are eloquent

examples of suppression of known facts and misrepresentation of events. In the *Cambridge History of India* the annexations of Mysore, Coorg, Cachar, and Jaintia are all described in ten lines. Here, again, there were one or two earlier British historians who told the truth, and this only makes the shortcomings of the later historians all the more inexcusable.

I have referred above to earlier and later British historians and emphasized the difference between the two in respect of their histories of the British period. The comparative superiority of the former is thus accounted for by two British historians, Edward Thompson and G. T. Garratt, in a bibliographical note to their book, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, published in 1934.

“Of general histories of British India, those written a century or more ago are, with hardly an exception, franker, fuller, and more interesting than those of the last fifty years. In days when no one dreamed that anyone would ever be seditious enough to ask really fundamental questions (such as ‘What right have you to be in India at all?’), and when no one ever thought of any public but a British one, criticism was lively and well informed, and judgement was passed without regard to political exigencies. Of late years, increasingly and no doubt naturally, all Indian questions have tended to be approached from the standpoint of administration: ‘Will this make for easier and quieter government?’ The writer of today inevitably has a world outside his own people, listening intently and as touchy as his own people, as swift to take offence. ‘He that is not for us is against us.’ This knowledge of an overhearing, even eavesdropping public, of being *in partibus infidelium*, exercises a constant silent censorship, which has made British-Indian history the worst patch in current scholarship.”¹²

There is a great deal of truth in this analysis, but there is another factor of still greater importance. No Government relishes being discredited in public, and therefore a free and frank statement of historical facts provokes its wrath. No Indian historian dared reveal the whole truth when it was likely to offend the Government, and that accounts for the virtual absence of true history of the British period written

by any Indian. But even the British writers were not always immune from the wrath of the ruling authority. The fate of Cunningham, the author of the *History of the Sikhs*, is a classical example and may be stated in the words of Malleeson.

“The work (*History of the Sikhs*) appeared in 1849. Extremely well written, giving the fullest and the most accurate details of events, the book possessed one quality which, in the view of the Governor-General of the day, the Marquis of Dalhousie, rendered the publication of it a crime. It told the whole truth, the unpalatable truth, regarding the first Sikh war; it exposed the real strength of the Sikh army; the conduct of, and the negotiations with, the Sikh chiefs.

“The book, if unnoticed by high authority, would have injured no one. The Punjab had been annexed, or was in the process of annexation, when it appeared. But a despotic Government cannot endure truths which seem to reflect on the justice of its policy. Looking at the policy of annexation from the basis of Cunningham’s book, that policy was undoubtedly unjust. Cunningham’s book would be widely read, and would influence the general verdict.***** That an officer holding a high political office should write a book which, by the facts disclosed in it, reflected, however indirectly, on his policy was not to be endured. With one stroke of the pen, then, he removed Cunningham from his appointment at Bhopal. Cunningham, stunned by the blow, entirely unexpected, died of a broken heart!”¹³

So far about the British historians. As regards the Indian historians the chief defect arose from national sentiments and patriotic fervour which magnified the virtues and minimized the defects of their own people. It was partly a reaction against the undue depreciation of the Indians in the pages of British histories like those of Mill, and partly an effect of the growth of national consciousness and a desire for improvement in their political status. It is a noticeable fact that these defects gained momentum with the movement for political reforms, and later, in the course of the struggle for freedom.

An extreme example is furnished by K. P. Jayaswal. The repeated declarations of British historians that absolute

¹³J. D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (Calcutta, 1904), Preface.

despotism was the only form of Government in Ancient India provoked Indian historians, who, following the footsteps of Rhys Davids, emphasized the existence of republican and oligarchical forms of Government. This reaction was, generally speaking, kept within reasonable limits of historical truth; but Jayaswal carried the whole thing to ludicrous excess in his *Hindu Polity*, by his theory of a Parliamentary form of Government in Ancient India, which is a replica of the British Parliament including the formal Address from the Throne, etc., and many other statements of the kind. Similarly, historical discussions on social and religious matters are not unoften coloured by the orthodox views on the subject. The recent acrimonious discussion on the killing of cows shows how even clearly established facts of history are twisted to suit present views. A truly scientific spirit of history is often sacrificed in discussions of such subjects as, "Did the Aryans come to India from outside?", "Was there a caste system in the R̥gveda?", and conscious attempts are often made to explain away, ignore, or minimize, the harsh treatment accorded by the high caste Hindus to the lower castes, particularly Śūdras and Caṇḍālas.

So far as Medieval India is concerned, there is a distinct and conscious attempt to rewrite the whole chapter of the bigotry and intolerance of the Muslim rulers towards Hindu religion.¹⁴ This was prompted by the political motive of bringing together the Hindus and Musalmans in a common fight against the British. A history written under the auspices of the Indian National Congress sought to repudiate the charge that the Muslim rulers ever broke any Hindu temple, and asserted that they were the most tolerant in matters of religion. Following in its footsteps a noted historian has sought to exonerate Mahmūd of Ghaznī's bigotry and fanaticism, and several writers in India have come forward to defend Aurangzīb against Jadunath's charge of religious intolerance. It is interesting to note that in the revised edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, one of them, while re-writing the article on Aurangzīb originally written by Sir William Irvine, has

¹⁴Numerous instances of these have been given by Prof. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar in *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. III, Numbers 1 & 2, 1963-4, p. 58.

expressed the view that the charge of breaking Hindu temples brought against Aurangzīb is a disputed point. Alas for poor Jadunath Sarkar, who must have turned in his grave if he were buried. For after reading his *History of Aurangzeb*, one would be tempted to ask, if the temple-breaking policy of Aurangzīb is a disputed point, is there a single fact in the whole recorded history of mankind which may be taken as undisputed? A noted historian has sought to prove that "the Hindu population was better off under the Muslims than under the Hindu tributaries or independent rulers." While some historians have sought to show that the Hindu and Muslim cultures were fundamentally different and formed two distinct and separate units flourishing side by side, the late K. M. Ashraf sought to prove that the Hindus and Muslims had no cultural conflict. But the climax was reached by the politician-cum-historian Lala Lajpat Rai when he asserted "that the Hindus and Muslims have coalesced into an Indian people very much in the same way as the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes and Normans formed the English people of today."¹⁵ His further assertion "that the Muslim rule in India was not a foreign rule" has now become the oft-repeated slogan of a certain political party. The pity of the whole thing is that history books which do not incorporate these views are not likely to be prescribed as textbooks, and any one who challenges these statements would be included in the black list of the Government of India.

Coming to the British period, national sentiments prejudiced a calm consideration of several episodes. Two of these are, (1) the Black Hole Tragedy and character of Sirāju'd-daulah; and (2) the nature of the outbreak of 1857. Having myself written on both these topics I would not like to dwell on the merits of the different points of view. Reference has already been made above to other episodes where historians have been influenced by racial or national sentiments. To these may be added many questions concerning economic and administrative systems; in almost all of which the British and Indian views have been influenced more or less by national or patriotic feelings.

¹⁵*Young India*, pp. 73-5.

To this long array of defects of modern historiography in India, may be added another charge mostly levelled by Indians in recent times. It is said that the historians merely collect facts but do not make any generalizations or frame laws on their basis, while the real task of history is to reveal the spirit of humanity and trace the course of progress towards liberty. I do not think the charge is a legitimate one and would try to rebut it by the observations of some eminent scholars. The views of Fisher already quoted by me have been rebutted by other eminent historians like Acton who looks upon history as "the unfolding story of human freedom." A. L. Rowse also refutes Fisher's view and says: "No; there is no one rhythm or plot in history, but there are rhythms, plots, patterns, even repetitions. So that it is possible to make generalizations and to draw lessons."¹⁶ On the other hand, Sir Charles Oman in a way supports Fisher.

"History", says he, "is a series of interesting happenings, often illogical and cataclysmic, not a logical and orderly development from causes to inevitable results. In short, history is full of 'might have beens', and these sometimes deserve as much attention as the actual, but by no means necessary, course of events."¹⁷

But whatever view we may adopt in this matter so far as the history of Europe is concerned, our very inadequate knowledge of data in Indian history renders such generalizations a difficult and risky process. I fully share the views expressed by Sir Jadunath Sarkar in the course of his estimate of Sir William Irvine as a historian. He observes: "Some are inclined to deny Mr. Irvine the title of the Gibbon of India, on the ground that he wrote a mere narrative of events, without giving those reflections and generalizations that raise the *Decline and Fall* to the rank of a philosophical treatise and a classic in literature. But they forget that Indian historical studies are at present at a much more primitive stage than Roman history was when Gibbon began to write. We have yet to collect and edit our materials, and to construct the necessary foundation—the bed-rock of ascertained and unassailable facts—on which alone the superstructure of a

¹⁶Rowse, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁷Oman, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

philosophy of history can be raised by our happier successors. Premature philosophizing, based on unsifted facts and untrustworthy chronicles, will only yield a crop of wild theories and fanciful reconstructions of the past like those which J. T. Wheeler garnered in his now forgotten *History of India*, as the futile result of years of toil."¹⁸

During the post-Independence period, certain new trends are noticeable among the Indian historians in addition to those noted above. Strangely enough, these were foreseen by the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun. He includes, in a long list of defects of historians, "a very common desire to gain the favour of those of high rank, by praising them, by spreading their fame, by flattering them, by embellishing their doings and by interpreting in the most favourable way all their actions." He then justly observes that all this gives a distorted version of historical events.¹⁹ This characteristic is a growing menace to historiography in Modern India. The evil is enhanced by the fact that the Government, directly or indirectly, seeks to utilize history to buttress some definite ideas, such as the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence, the artificial conception of fraternal relation between the two great communities of India sedulously propagated by him, and several popular slogans evoked by the exigencies of the struggle for freedom. These have been accepted as a rich legacy by the Government, even though it practically means in many cases the sacrifice of truth, the greatest legacy which Gandhi meant to bequeath to mankind.

Thus the cult of non-violence is an ideal devoutly to be wished for, but when historians of India seriously maintain that this ideal has been followed throughout the course of Indian history, one rubs his eyes with wonder, for not only are all the known facts of Indian rulers against the assumption that they were averse to war, but war has been recommended by political texts as a normal practice and sanctioned by religion through the *aśvamedha* sacrifice and eulogy of *digvijaya*. The Court-poets flattered the patron king by giving him the proud epithet of 'hero of hundred fights'.

¹⁸Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Ed. by J. N. Sarkar, Vol. I, p. xxiv.

¹⁹*The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, Vol. IV, Numbers 1 & 2, p. 52.

Such distortion of history can never be excused even in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. Similar distortions have been made on other topics mentioned above.

The net result has been that the oft-quoted phrase, 'History is past politics', is likely to be substituted soon by a new phrase, 'History is present politics'. The attitude of the British Government towards Cunningham who dared include unpalatable truths in history, has not quitted India along with the British, and an Indian historian today is not always really free to write even true history if it is likely to offend the ruling party. I know from personal experience that any expression of views, not in consonance with the officially accepted view, is dubbed as anti-national, and is likely to provoke the wrath of the Government.

No wonder that even eminent historians feel shy of, even if not prevented from, telling the whole truth. An apt illustration is furnished by the official history of the 'Freedom Movement in Bihar' (1957). Much has been said in it of Kunwar Singh as the local organizer and a hero of the great 'War of Independence' in 1857. But no mention has been made of a document which shows that the local sepoys, *who had already mutinied*, threatened to plunder his house and property if he did not join them. It can hardly be excused on the ground of ignorance, for it was the author of this history who first brought this document to light and published it in a local magazine. Some other documents of similar nature have also been withheld.

When I was writing out the first draft of this lecture, the Proceedings of the Indian History Congress in 1964 and 1965 reached my hands. The Address of the General President in the 1964 session contains an elaborate presentation of the trends and concepts of history which appear to me to be a great departure from the ideals and concepts of history which I have outlined above. It may be reasonably assumed that these trends and concepts dominate at least a section of Indian historians today, and as such deserve careful scrutiny. "History", we are told, "has a mission and obligation to lead humanity to a higher ideal and nobler future. The historian cannot shirk this responsibility by hiding his head into the false dogma of objectivity, that his job is merely to chronicle the past. His task is to reveal the spirit of humanity and guide

it towards self-expression.”²⁰ Some concrete steps are suggested for achieving this noble end. History must not call to memory “ghastly aberrations of human nature, of dastardly crimes, of divisions and conflicts, of degeneration and decay, but of the higher values of life, of traditions of culture and of the nobler deeds of sacrifice and devotion to the service of humanity.”²¹ In other words, history should record the spread of Buddhism by Aśoka, but not the horrors of the Kalinga war, carefully avoid all references to the devastation and massacre of Mahmūd of Ghaznī, destruction of temples by Aurangzib, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre by General Dyer, the holocaust during communal riots, and so on. The reason for these omissions is that such things bring some “unhealthy trends which militate against the concept of national solidarity or international peace.”²² We are further told that “the purpose of history was to trace the course of progress towards liberty.”²³ To crown all, it is declared that even “*facts* of Indian history and the Process of its march have to be judged by the criterion of progress towards liberty, morality and opportunities for self-expression.”²⁴

So far as I understand, all these mark a definite departure from the accepted principles of historiography. As a concrete instance of the radical difference in the ideals of historiography which animates the post-Independence era in India, I may quote another passage from the Presidential Address:

“The most important subject awaiting the critical touch of the historian, however, is the national movement, particularly the age dominated by Mahatma Gandhi, which restored the independence of the country. The historian has to get behind the external of the events and detect the spirit which animated them, and thereby reveal the soul of India. That approach alone will help to surmount the danger of provoking communal, regional, linguistic and class hatreds which unfortunately beset history writing.”²⁵

I must confess that in writing the ‘History of Freedom Movement’ I have not kept all this high ideal before me. I

²⁰*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1964, Part I, p. 16.*

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 11.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 12. (*Italics mine.*)

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

have preferred to follow the footsteps of Ranke, and may say in his words: "My book does not aspire to such lofty functions as are laid down in the Presidential address. Its aim is merely to show what actually occurred, with such comments as are obviously suggested by it."

For a similar reason I demur to the principle that the purpose of history is to trace the course of progress towards liberty, and that even *facts* have to be arranged and judged by that criterion. The real purpose of history is to report correctly the progress of events, which did not in all cases mark the progress towards liberty. When all this is coupled with a definite instruction for avoiding mention of violent deeds, or even such *facts* as militate against the concept of national solidarity or international peace, we cannot but feel that Gandhian philosophy, which sought in vain to regenerate politics by infusing morality into it, has succeeded in inoculating history with his moral ideas. It may be a laudable project, but then, I would humbly suggest that history as a subject of study be omitted from our curriculum and replaced by books containing Gandhi's philosophy and morality. The lack of knowledge of history may perhaps be made good by development of moral character.

I would cite only one more example which gives a forecast of the shape that Indian history would take in the future. The President of Section II (Medieval India) of the Indian History Congress held at Allahabad in 1965 begins his address by pointing out the chief errors of Sir Henry Elliot and other Anglo-Indian writers of Medieval India. One of these is, to quote his own words, "the wholly impossible and erroneous conclusion that the Musalmans, as such, were a governing class, while the Hindus, as such, were the governed."²⁶ Another error is that "while pointing out the crimes of the medieval kings and their governing classes they quite overlooked what was happening at the same time in contemporary Europe."²⁷

The President then refers to "India's contact with Islam which had a deep impact on social, cultural, political and economic life of the country."²⁸ The net result of this is

²⁶*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1965, p. 140..*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid, p. 141.*

reflected in the following successive stages in the evolution of Medieval India. First, the *Turkish State* of the Ilbarites; second, the *Indo-Muslim State* of the Khalji and the Tughluqs, and third, the emergence of the *Indian State* of the Mughals. We are told that "Akbar's political outlook was an outcome of the accumulated political wisdom of the generations that had gone by and was a logical development inherent in the very nature of the situation."²⁹ Unfortunately, nothing is said about his successors, particularly Aurangzib, though it is claimed that on account of the continuity in this cultural evolution, the Mughal empire lasted longer than the whole of the Sultanate period.

There is hardly any doubt that the modern trends of Indian historiography noted above are inspired, or at least influenced to a large extent, by the attitude of the Government in deliberately seeking to utilize history for the spread of ideas which they have elevated to the rank of national policy to their own satisfaction. They are not willing to tolerate any history which mentions facts incompatible with their ideas of national integration and solidarity. They do not inquire whether the facts stated are true or the views expressed are reasonable deductions from facts, but condemn outright any historical writings which in their opinion are likely to go against their views about such things as Hindu-Muslim fraternity, the non-existence of separate Hindu and Muslim cultures on account of their fusion into one Indian culture, etc. I mention these particular instances, as I am in a position to substantiate them by documentary evidence, but reference may be made to many other illustrations, less susceptible to positive evidence. All these things are done in the name of national policy, which is at best the policy of a political party. But it violates the only national policy, which cannot be challenged by any party, namely 'Truth shall prevail', the motto engraved on our national emblem. This policy also underlies the most advanced ideal of historiography, as I have discussed above, and was expressed more than fifty years ago by the greatest historian of India, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, as chairman of a historical conference in Bengal. The following is a literal English translation of the original Bengali passage:

²⁹*Ibid*, p. 146.

“ I would not care whether truth is pleasant or unpleasant, and in consonance with or opposed to current views. I would not mind in the least whether truth is or is not a blow to the glory of my country. If necessary, I shall bear in patience the ridicule and slander of friends and society for the sake of preaching truth. But still I shall seek truth, understand truth, and accept truth. This should be the firm resolve of a historian.”

Later, when Dr. Rajendra Prasad launched a scheme to write a comprehensive national history of India on a co-operative basis and requested Jadunath to become its chief editor, Jadunath wrote to him on 19 November 1937: “ National history, like every other history worthy of the name and deserving to endure, must be true as regards the facts and reasonable in the interpretation of them. It will be national not in the sense that it will try to suppress or white-wash everything in our country’s past that is disgraceful, but because it will admit them and at the same time point out that there were other and nobler aspects in the stages of our nation’s evolution which offset the former.... In this task the historian must be a judge. He will not suppress any defect of the national character, but add to his portraiture those higher qualities which, taken together with the former, help to constitute the entire individual.”

In his reply to the above, dated 22 November 1937, Dr. Rajendra Prasad wrote: “ I entirely agree with you that no history is worth the name which suppresses or distorts facts. A historian who purposely does so under the impression that he thereby does good to his native country really harms it in the end. Much more so in the case of a country like ours which has suffered much on account of its national defects, and which must know and understand them to be able to remedy them.”³⁰

I solemnly hope and pray that these words would be remembered by the present and future generations of Indian historians, for I see great dangers lurking ahead. I was reading recently a book entitled *Contemporary History in*

³⁰*A New History of the Indian People*, Vol. VI, pp. vi-vii.

the Soviet Mirror published in 1964. I was struck by many passages, a few of which I quote at random.

“The present official line in historiography is, if anything, even more militantly partisan than it was in Stalin’s day.”

“The Soviet politicians have a narrow and utilitarian view of the functions of scholarship.” “Nothing could be more destructive of historical scholarship than the claim that the party is the repository of supreme wisdom... In the Soviet Union today historians, like everyone else, are required to believe that, by some mysterious process unfathomable to an ordinary mortal, the party has been infallible.” “The partisan approach to history prevents the observer from recognizing the sanctity of objective facts and requires him, where necessary, to deny the evidence of his senses; for there are occasions when he must subordinate his own personal concept of truth to that held by an individual or group of individuals, namely the party.”

I hope it would be obvious to most people that these symptoms constitute dangerous impediments to the growth of true historiography. What is less obvious is that our country, dominated by party system, is rapidly moving towards the same tragic end.

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